DoOcracy

A **do-ocracy** (also sometimes **do-opoly**, which is a more obvious pun on "**duopoly**") is an organizational structure in which individuals choose roles and tasks for themselves and execute them. Responsibilities attach to people who **do** the work, rather than elected or selected officials.

The term is popular with libertarian management afficionados and BurningMan**?** participants. It also has a Zen nature that can be hard for some people to fathom. "Why is it Lion who posts so many big ideas on **CommunityWiki**?" "Because Lion posts so many big ideas on **CommunityWiki**." Doing a task is in itself justification for you being the person who does that job.

A do-ocratic example: 30 people are going to Burning Man and camping together. Mary asks on their MailingList**?**, "What if we organize a food pool so we can all cook and eat together?" Others answer, "Sure, I'd be a part of that," or "I can make cake on Friday night." (Or, often, *nobody* answers!) Soon, Mary is calling campmates to borrow pots, pans and utensils, posting weekly menus to the mailing list, collating different people's dietary restrictions, collecting money for food, and organizing trips to the store to buy supplies. At camp, she posts work signup sheets for cooking and cleanup, answers questions, and fills in when others can't (or don't) do their shifts.

A new campmate may grumble, "Jeez, why does *Mary* get to decide what everyone eats and when they work? Who put her in charge?" Older and wiser heads will say, "This is a **do-ocracy**. If you think you can do Mary's job, and you *want* to, then get up there and **do** it. She'll probably be relieved. If not, don't be a jerk and make a big stink about it, or else she'll stop working so hard and we won't have anything to eat!"

A second example: in a medium-sized corporation, the IT group has become ossified and unresponsive to their users' needs. Requests from other parts of the company for computer software or hardware are met with condescending attitudes, over-formal requirements meetings, chargeback, big budget overruns and long schedule delays.

Meanwhile, a pair of graphic designers in the marketing department teach themselves PHP over a weekend to get a customer survey website up for Monday morning (a job that IT spec'd out for 14 months of work). Soon, others in the marketing department are asking the designers for web applications to share product ideas with clients, track hours of contractors, and organize the company softball league. Word gets around in the company that "those guys who wear black in Marketing" will do quick-and-dirty Web apps for whatever you need. The designers' boss hires another "designer" to handle the increasing number of work requests.

Things come to a head when one of IT's star 36-month projects is cancelled because "the app those guys in Marketing did for us is good enough." IT issues an edict on company email that "pirate" software "will not be supported" by IT helpdesk staff and is an improper use of company property (the network). In an executive meeting, the management decides to split off "the guys in marketing" as a new "Experimental Apps Taskforce", relegating IT to network maintenance and desktop support.

Necessary conditions

Do-ocracy typically evolves spontaneously in groups where:

- **Stakes are low**. Typically, if job X or task Y didn't get done, or got done poorly, it's not a life-or-death situation.
- **Authority is non-coercive.**
- **Work is plentiful.** There are lots of jobs to do, and lots of people to do them.
- **Effort is rewarded with recognition.**

- **Culture of participation.** Each member of the community feels a right and a duty to take on responsibilities.

Contrast

- **Democracy**. In a democracy, everyone has a say in what gets done. In a do-ocracy, everyone does jobs that they think need to be done, without everyone's input.
- **Meritocracy**. In a meritocracy, the most qualified people for a job are selected for that job. In a do-ocracy, whoever does the job gets it, no matter how well they're qualified.

Dangers

- **Burnout**. People can get too attached to the do-ocratic system and volunteer for too many jobs, or too much work, and tend to have a low TruckFactor**?**.
- **Despotism**. A person who's doocrat'd themselves into control of a very necessary system (network, food pool, etc.) can get heady with power and demand rewards or tribute for their work.
- **Frustration**. Some people don't have the time or means to do something, but they do have (real or imagined) expertise. In a doocracy, they will feel overrun and perceive the situation as slipping out of their hands. This can cause frustration. And remember: "Fear is the path to the dark side…"
- **FairProcess?**. Doocracy is not always explicitly defined, so there are diverging perception dangers about "fairness".
- **Resentment**. If only a minority of participants in the community do-ocratize themselves into the hard jobs, they can resent others who don't take on responsibility.
- **The Martyrdom Complex**. Some people have a psychological need to work strenuously most of the time, perhaps because they are seeking persecution and suffering, motivated by a desire for penance. In do-ocracy, people with these psychological needs tend to take more responsibility and sometimes make strict rules to impose on others.
- **Complacency**. If a minority of people take on jobs, the others can become complacent and ignore new tasks, since "someone else will do it."
- **Social Exclusion**. People who can't do things, or choose not do things, are often marginalized in decision-making, which compounds social divides.
- The **TyrannyOfStructurelessness?**.

Examples

- **Open Source Software**. Typically, Open Source development groups care less about qualifications, age, and location than how much and what quality of work people submit.
- **IETF**. Internet standards are written by… the people who submit standards. Per David Clark, one of the most famous quotes about the Internet: "We reject kings, presidents and voting. We believe in rough consensus and running code".
- The **BitchunSociety?** from CoryDoctorow**?**'s **DownAndOutInTheMagicKingdom**. Probably an extreme form of do-ocracy.
- **Wiki**.

See Also

🌰 volunteer 🌰 volunteerism 🌰 democracy 🌰 governance 🌰 freesoftware 🌰 project

- **LimitsOfDemocracyOnline**

- **Linux User Group HOWTO, 7.4 Elections, democracy, and turnover** – by Rick Moen, on how to mix **DoOcracy** and democracy, and how not to
- **Don Marti: WordPress meets Coral** – referrer; also, pointed out to us the Rick Moen piece

Discussion

EvanProdromou: I've heard this term pretty often in BurningMan**?** circles, and it occured to me tonight that it's actually an applicable model to wiki, open source software, and many medium-sized communities. I thought I'd doocratize myself into a role as expert on **DoOcracy** and get this page started.

MarkDilley: this is excellent! At a union I worked at a few years ago we called Department Organizers, the volunteer position that has less responsibilites than a ShopSteward**?**, DOers. A union is only as strong as folks doing things.

BrandonCsSanders: Wow! I love this page. I interpret the BitchunSociety**?** as a combination of **DoOcracy**/Meritocracy. **DoOcracy**: Folks earn whuffie by doing a good job at whatever work they decide needs doing. Meritocracy: When there is contention for a desirable job, those with lower whuffie (less meritorious) are expected to make way for those with higher whuffie (more meritorious). In **DownAndOutInTheMagicKingdom**, Doctorow call this combination an "ad-hocracy".

AlexSchroeder: I love it. ☺

LionKimbro: Me too. {☺}=

I think the danger is: Do-Ocracy's that come to be very successful become "real world powers," rather than just "little experiments." Then the question of democracy and institutional responsibility arises, I believe.

But, yeah: Totally! DIY.

sigi: in combination with our wiki tree, there is no danger, even if we become "real world powers", i believe.

@ evan (as an expert on do-ocracy): how would you then call our wiki tree? personality?

TedErnst: Lion, could you say more about this danger of becoming a real world power? Are you saying **DoOcracy** can't work anywhere where it matters?

LionKimbro: I think **DoOcracy** *makes* things that matter.

I think it's like a seed.

But after it's grown up, after the thing is born, it ceases to be a **DoOcracy**.

Or if it *can* work, I don't know that we can call it Democracy.

This page is pretty clear about that.

We already have a **DoOcracy**; It's called Free Market Capitalism.

Consider the story he gave, about the people doing things in a corporation.

- It starts out avante guard. They're just *goin!* **DoOcracy** in action.
- There's a resistance, though: There are people who care about what they're doing, in a negative way: They don't like it. (Your actions affect others, others have thoughts about your actions.)
- They succeed though, and it works! Most people like it!
- **The system is institutionalized.** They are given an official branch, yes, but it's clearly surrogate to the organization.

When things start to "matter," there's a controversy, and people decide whether they want the thing to live or die. If they decide "die," the thing stops by force. If they decide "live," the thing lives at the mercy of the judgement system in place.

EvanProdromou: I agree with Lion that there are dangers to this structure. It's easy to point to historical examples of people and organizations that took on responsibilities not formally reserved for them, and it turned out to be a BadThing**?**.

DavidCary: Yes. On the other hand, we can also point to historical examples of people and organizations that failed to accept responsibility, certain things needed to be done and no one stepped up to do it, and that also turned out to be a BadThing**?**.

I know some people that would be baffled by our excitement over this concept. To them, it's just common sense: when you see something that needs to be done, you go ahead and do it.

LionKimbro: I guess we're so used to situations where you *cannot* just do it, that we're surprised that there are things where you *can.*

Try performing **DoOcracy** in your neighborhood, for example, and see where it gets you…

Workplaces are of different degrees of tolerance of **DoOcracy**.

"Activist" is practically a bad word, by my read of US TV politics.

(incidentally: I believe I mis-wrote, when I said, "the danger." I just wanted to point out that there is an intrinsic tension between Democracy and **DoOcracy**.)

HansWobbe: Could the statement… *tension between Democracy and DoOcracy* be expanded to illustrate its meaning a bit more? My current appreciation for this statement feels limited by my initial opinion that they are fundamentally different concepts (orthogonal - making it difficult for me to see them creating a tension).

That being said, I frequently see a lot of conflict arising from what I think are adherents to these two different approaches. In most of these conflicts, I've noted that there are generally 'vested interests' that are not at all apparent at first glance. i.e. People who espouse democracy and those that espouse **DoOcracy** frequently have opposing (undisclosed) vested interests underlying their apparent tensions and conflicts.

LionKimbro: They are fundamentally different ideas, and, disembodied, there is no tension. But, when we usually see these ideas, they are EmbodiedIdea**?**s.

I think a lot of the people who champion **DoOcracy** *also* champion Democracy, and vice versa. But there's some contradiction there.

In Democracy, "the people are in power." What people want, en masse, by some sort of agenda setting process and voting, is what comes to be.

In **DoOcracy**, "the people who do things are in power." Want something done? Just do it yourself.

The conflict comes when something that someone just wants to do by themselves, is considered an irritant by the people en masse.

I'm immediately thinking about **TwinOaks**; How people have tried to do things on their own, but been shut down by the community. A community (100) or a society (1000's+) is often **SelectivelyOpenMinded** about what sort of freedoms a person or small group can have. I think that the more mass voting systems are in place and so on, the fewer freedoms individuals and small groups have. By my reading of **DoOcracy**, this is an obstacle.

I don't know; Maybe I'm just bitter about how the USA is turning out. My 6 year old daughter is hardly allowed to walk out of the house, not because I fear for her safety, but because Amber & I have a pretty good idea of what our society will think of us (and do to us) if we let her out, unattended. **[1]**

Perhaps **DoOcracy** and Democracy can be neatly reconciled. I think the question then isn't so much question of "method of government," but more: "What do people think in their heads? What is their

philosophy of tolerance and governance?" Holistic thinking, rather than thinking just about **DoOcracy** and / vs. Democracy, would be better, then, I think.

- "What are the governing bodies?"
- "What can they say or do?"
- "What freedoms are irrevocable?"
- "How are governing bodies restrained?"

Perhaps most importantly: "What do the people care to think, say, or do?"

We could live in either a totalitarian dictatorship, or without any rules at all, if *all* people were angels.

BenjaminMelançon: I'm glad I ran across this page, because I've always disliked the concept of meritocracy (elitist and usually arbitrary), yet never thought democracy was sufficient for organizing a society in the best possible way (necessary, but not sufficient; and "best" meaning the most possible power for all people over our own lives, and the liberty, justice, well-being, progress inherent in this, and the equality required by it).

Mostly, though, I'm opposed to modern feudalism, monarchy, monopoly, oligarchy, theocracy, and corrupt corporate capitalism, all of which have more to do with true power in most alleged democracies.

(Not that I didn't have an idea of what kind of world I wanted to live in, helping **build** it is a goal in life and I quit white-collar work to join the new **Agaric Design Collective** doing web development. But it's nice to have a word to go with the ideas!)

So I just wanted to point out that while tension between democracy and do-ocracy certainly can exist, and is a rich area for discussion, they are by no means the only two systems of rule. In fact, the main task before us is expanding both democracy and do-ocracy to replace what dominates most of our societies: rule based on control of resources, heredity, and power in hierarchical organization. This is power backed by force or threat (of not having a place to live or food to eat…) which needs a concerted effort to change organizations. There are other forms of power based on some sort of social status (religious leaders, elders, celebrity, propagandists) that we may like or not, and advocate for or against, but can be separated from political, economic, and organizational structure (though I'd argue most of the soft power I don't like is related and somewhat reliant on illegitimate structures of hard power!)

Please feel free to edit this overly long contribution from a newbie, but I hope to have refocused the discussion on the greater conflict between wholly illegitimate systems and desirable, equitable methods, rather than just the conflict among the latter group.

ReedHedges: Some possible dangers ? -

1. Nobody wants to do the crap jobs, so they don't get done 2. Nobody is looking at the big picture, and neccesary or useful tasks get overlooked 3. "Oh, somebody else will do that." I guess that might be complacency.

RadomirDopieralski: I think that as soon as the situation gets worse and worse because of not doing the "crap jobs", someone will finally get up and do them. The trick is to prepare the environment in such a way, that the cost of postponing the work is low and the warning signs appear early.

In Judo, most joint locks are forbidden, except for the elbow locks – that's because that's the only joint where the pain appears much earlier than a real danger of damaging it. In similar way, if the situation becomes very uncomfortable before the amount of work required to fix it grows too large, the system should work.

I think it's symptomatic how **DoOcracy** spreads among users of various forms of version-managed systems. It's one possible way to provide the safety margin between the point where the situation is uncomfortable and the point where it becomes fatal.

The question is: what techniques can be used to introduce such safety buffers in various environments?

SamRose: The times when I have seen Reed's dangers become reality is when the majority of people allow it to happen in an effort. Of course, this is a system that was doomed to die from the beginning, because everyone internally decided they would not do the "crap jobs" no matter what. I think it's actually rare to see this happen, if people are invested heavily in any system. Because of the "pain" that Radomir describes above. The "pain" spreads through the system, and people either quickly totally abandon the system, or re-adjust and take up the slack (FightOrFlight**?**)

DavidCary: Interesting thoughts, **RadomirDopieralski**. Structuring the environment such that people can see and fix potential problems long before they become real problems.

This seems closely related to the "convert step tasks to **RampTask**" idea – structuring the environment so that people can see and work towards potential wonderful things long before they are "done".

(Note to self: create RampTask page from info in SoftwareBazaar – an environment where one person can work on a project for much less than 1 week, and immediately see that they have made progress, and another person can immediately build on what the first person has done.)

Joseph Brenner: I just wanted to amplify the discussion of the dangers of this concept: people who like to talk about "do-ocracy" often seem to mean "I get to do whatever I want" – they're trying to place anything that they've done above criticism – and strangely enough they're often not so respectful of other people doing things when it un-does something that they've done. In the context of Burning Man, it's an excuse to avoid listening to criticism from the people who are merely customers and are not Volunteers, but it's not as though anyone is going to listen to you if you volunteer, either. Really, it takes a lot of mental effort to step back from what you've done, and pay attention to criticism at all (which after all, often seems pretty clueless, and sometimes really is pretty clueless), and it's a very good idea for volunteer organizations to cultivate the knack of listening.

RadomirDopieralski: I get it a lot when drawing – you cannot see faults and mistakes you made in a drawing you have just done, you are too preoccupied with details. You can also see it in copywriting. You have to either wait until your mindset changes, or ask for help someone else – it's a common practice to ask people to proofread your copies, and among programmers to ask for a code review. Then again, it's usually requested – at the moment chosen by the creator, and from people chosen by the creator – so it doesn't create such a conflict.

HansWobbe: I'm having to spend a lot of time on "consensus building" activities just now and I am struggling with several aspects of…

- Opinions - held by individuals with vastly different experiences (and likely several "undisclosed" interests and motives)
- "Authority" (to make decisions)
- (Constructive) criticism It seems all of this has been discussed in wikis for quite some time, but I don't have the sense that any helpful Conclusions have emerged. Does anyone know of any?

LionKimbro: Peggy Holman has a lot of expertise on just these questions. If you're looking for someone to talk with, please consider Peggy Holman. (Tell her Lion says hi.)

I suspect that answering these things depends a lot on the people involved, and what their values and worldview are.

I am grappling with these questions with Spiriata, **SaturdayHouse**, and elsewhere. In a certain sense, these are some of the key questions behind how a society is going to work at the mechanical level of exchanging thoughts and making decisions.

Some of my own questions are:

- How do I ensure that everybody's creativity is expressed?
- How do I propose and add structure, and demonstrate an inspiring strength, without being an inflexible dictator?
- How do I inspire others to do just this, as well!
- What are the deals being made? What are the deals intentionally not being made?

- What are my limits? Where will I "go no further" with individuals, and a whole group?
- (and so on)

I think that if we figure out a core story, of what we're trying to accomplish, then we can start to perfect a technique, to make things efficient. "Best practices" arise.

But without a story about what we're doing or what we're trying to accomplish, then we can't accumulate best practices.

HansWobbe: It does seem be necessary (even if it turns out to be "necessary, but not sufficient") to develop "a story about what we're doing or what we are trying to accomplish". That being said, this may turn out to be a bit of a "chicken or egg" problem since… we might have to try to solve the problems we are try to solve, in order to solve them.

I will try to at least look at the Peggy Holman material, but am unlikely to try to contact her unless I can find something very specific I need to explore, that I also feel would be of benefit to her, should I contact her.

LionKimbro: Yes, yes… ☺

I keep coming back to this comment, in my mind.

It's archetypal.

So what's the vector of difference between this **DoOcracy** and a RepresentativeDemocracy**?** or DeliberativeDemocracy**?** or some other model where those who for whatever reason aren't "doing" visible or influential things aren't valued?

Do we lose factions/parties and other means of allying in favour of workgroups? Do we lose a say over activities we are too old or sick to participate in at present?

RadomirDopieralski: Well, if you are sick and old, but still have extensive knowledge about the topic at hand or organization skills, you still get to start various initiatives – this is also "doing". If you have no idea about what is going on and no strong point, then you probably shouldn't be making decisions anyways, it's responsibility, not reward, you know.

Of course you have to detach it from the social position that is in our culture associated with decision making: in **DoOcracy** you you get to make decisions when you show initiative, not necessarily when you are the alpha male of the pack, bashing others on the head.

FridemarPache: Thank you for your profound discussion on **DoOcracy**. As **DoOcracy** holds as one of the core values at AboutusOrg**?** and since there might be even more discussion potential in Meatball, I belink these wikis for the mutual benefit. Please feel free to find/add more Twinpages.
MattisManzel: Recently I found myself back in a bar trying to explain about **DoOcracy** (sometimes CamelCase**?** is really better) in my broken Italian. I just realized that I never stated here that I like this concept a lot. Maybe it should even have been world-doocracy-wiki instead of **world-democracy-wiki**? ☺

TwinPages**?**: ⇔

- **Meatball**
- **AboutusOrg**

DanielMacKay: Hey! This fits very well with the **IdeaCauldron** !!

It fits but is not the same. **IdeaCauldron** is a method, it puts the obstacle for everybody to understand how it works - nice and simple btw. Doocracy is a jam-session. It's the temporary *djins* that are temporarily around in that very moment in that late basement band rehersal room that make you invent or pick up a

line weaving it all to one piece of temporary collab. Gone in the minute it's over unless you recorded (or remember!) it.

AlexSchroeder: I think the Idea Cauldron is a method to **transform a committee into a doocracry** – to empower the people that are ready to do something, and to cut down on the talking.

Committee room, designed 1901, in Halifax Town Hall

MattisManzel: I say nothing. I'm just editing and thereby tear the page **DoOcracy** into the [[soup**?**]] of the community-wiki. Do-ocracy, I think, is too much of a nice concept not to do it, you know?

AlexDaniel: This is amazing!